THE RAGTIME SOCIETY

DEDICATED TO THE PRESERVATION OF CLASSIC RAGTIME

P.O. BOX 8 KING, ONT., CANADA

Vol. 3, No. 9. October, 1964

Orders for the new Tom Shea record are coming in thick and fast -- production is well under way and shipping of the album will start in about a week. The response has been really heavy, so if you find there is a slight delay in having your order filled, please bear with us.

We thought you might like to have a sort of sneak preview of RSR #2, so we have reproduced the album cover on page 65. This candid study was taken by one of Tom's friends who also designed the overall album jacket. Incidentally, you will notice that the official title of the album is "Tom Shea Plays Prairie Rags" -- not "Classic and Western Rags" as we announced last month. One other last-minute change: due to space limitations we had to delete one of the tracks when making the master disc. As a result, "Gladiolus Rag" was regretfully dropped; otherwise, the lineup remains the same as originally announced.

We are particularly pleased with the quality of RSR #2 and of the album jacket -- it is a fine job all round, and special thanks are due to Mike Montgomery for penning the very comprehensive liner notes.

"Tom Shea Plays Prairie Rags" is an album you'll be proud to add to your ragtime collection. Use the handy form below to order RSR #2 now!

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SHEET MUSIC

The sale of sheet music continues to be very slow, although the Reprint Club, details of which were announced in the June Newsletter, is away to a good start. The first two selections under this plan have been mailed to those who subscribed to the scheme earlier. The plan operates by prepayment, and a reprint is mailed out regularly at about one month intervals.

Those who have not yet sent in their $10.00 may do so now and still be eligible for all 14 or more reprints which the Society will provide. The advantages of the plan are obvious -- subscribers are guaranteed receipt of a minimum number of reprints, and these reprints will be only those rags which are available nowhere else. The Society hopes by this plan to be able to continue with its reprinting program, which started in early 1962 with Original Rags, and carried on through 23 numbers. All 23 reprints are still available at reduced prices. Write for a list of titles and prices.

PERFORMERS

All the ragtime fans in the southeast corner of Michigan must gather at the Old Heidelberg on Ann Arbor's Main Street on Friday nights. There is another good reason apart from the gallon-sized pitchers of beer they serve there. Ragtime Charlie and Sister Kate (see photo on next page) are the featured talent and they are joined from time to time by other assorted instruments, resulting in an almost continuous program of early jazz and blues, plus many ragtime solos from Charlie Rasch. Charlie is a keen pianist. I use the word keen because not only does Charlie have a terrific collection of rags to draw from, but he doesn't even stop to hoist the odd one.

Sister Kate (Mrs, Kathleen Ross) provides excellent banjo accompaniment and keeps right up to Charlie except for the classic rags. By the time the tuba got into the act, pumped by none other than Tom Shea, the old tavern was jumping. Others who joined in were Chas. Kercher on flute, clarinet and trumpet, Bill Pratt on sax and Walt Gower on clarinet. Theo Stein played a couple of first rate rag solos on the piano.

Old Heidelberg is not a sophisticated night club as in some larger cities -- it's a place to hear impromptu music first and to imbibe as an afterthought. The attentive audience, which applauded after every number, was composed mostly of younger people who obviously had come primarily to listen.

Try Ann Arbor on a Friday night. Guaranteed no discordant modern jazz.

-Jim Kinnear

Bob Darch dropped us a card (together with the photo on the next page) giving Seattle, San Diego and Toronto as bookings for the band during September and October, More details when available.

The August 27th issue of Down Beat reported the death of Glover Compton on June 11th in Chicago at the age of 80. Compton, together with his wife Nettie, is mentioned numerous time in "They All Played Ragtime." He knew and worked with Tony Jackson, with whom he collaborated on at least one composition.

Here it is! The Society's second recording venture brings you another fine mixture of classics and original compositions by Tom Shea. The album is now in production and response is heavy. Make sure of early delivery by ordering your copy now.

Bob Darch & his gang in action. West Coast and Toronto fans, keep an eye on your local papers for current bookings of the "Elite Syncopators."

No, it isn't a scene from "The Untouchables" - it's Ragtime Charlie Rasch and Sister Kate Ross who hold forth at the Old Heidelberg in Ann Arbor, Mich. See Jim Kinnear's account of a recent visit, page 64.

BOOK REVIEW

We're happy to introduce a new feature with this issue -- a series of book reviews by Gary Ellison. Gary has generously volunteered to take time from his studies and playing schedule to provide comments on current books dealing with ragtime and jazz. All books reviewed can be obtained through the Society on request.

"Jazz: A People's Music" by Sidney Finkelstein; a Jazz Book Club production.

This book is about just what the title says, jazz. There is little ragtime mentioned, and when it is mentioned it is usually incorrect. The author has done a very good job of comparing early and late jazz to early and late European classical music.

He also did a fine job discussing the origin of jazz dealing with the social aspects of the New Orleans Negro. Also discussed at length were changes in style brought about by Kansas City and Chicago jazzmen. In describing the music he says, "Rhythm is a product of the social function of music, and melody is its emotional life." Concerning racial abilities in music he states on page 232, "The Negro and white have exactly the same potentialities either for jazz or for conducting a Schubert symphony."

Where the sociological aspects of jazz are well handled, any mention of ragtime leaves quite a bit to be desired. This could stem from the fact that the book was written in 1948. "They All Played Ragtime" wasn't written until 1950. Finkelstein describes ragtime as having an "economical left hand" and that it is primarily right hand. He terms ragtime as barrelhouse and honkytonk. For ragtimers he uses Jelly Roll Morton, Fats Waller and James P. Johnson. Scott Joplin is only mentioned twice. First, on page 138: "New Orleans brought forth a phenomenal group of creative musicians like Joplin, Morton, Oliver and Armstrong." This links Scott Joplin with New Orleans, not Missouri.

Secondly, on page 246: "Jazz composition is practically as old as jazz itself. It rose in New Orleans. Scott Joplin, one of the most celebrated figures in early jazz, was known as a composer of piano rags, and wrote an operetta dealing with Negro history and using rag music."

Again, here is the New Orleans tie-in. No mention is made of Sedalia, Tom Turpin, Arthur Marshall, James Scott, or any other founder of ragtime.

The book speaks of the blues and jazz as outgrowths of ragtime. The author credits Jelly Roll Morton with writing "Beale Street Blues" instead of W. C. Handy.

"Jazz: A People's Music" is centered in New Orleans and deals mainly with jazz, not ragtime. Social aspects of American music are well handled. For this reason some might consider it worth-while reading.

-Gary Ellison

"THEY ALL PLAYED RAGTIME"

We have received a fresh shipment of the ragtimer's bible. Anyone who just didn't get around to it before -- or whose original copy is worn out -- can now order the Blesh & Janis classic directly from the Society at the usual price: $2.50 postpaid.

Tom Shea recently took time out from his many activities to send us this account of a summer trip to St. Louis:

Margaret (that's my beautiful wife) and I just got back from a very enjoyable three days in St. Louis where we visited most of the city's ragtime gang, and as a bonus, got to meet Bob Wright who came down from Chicago.

The St. Louis Ragtimers are still on Gaslight Square, but have moved around the corner to the Bustles and Bowes where they are packing them in as usual. They plan to stay on until this fall when they will move down to the river and into their own riverboat, The Goldenrod.

The Ragtimers are a remarkable group. When they play 'em, they play 'em for keeps with a solid, hair-on-the-chest beat that will lift you right off your chair. Rags, cakewalks, blues, minstrel songs and stomps roll out one after another -- each number carefully researched and performed with an authenticity that is startling.

Don't let anyone tell you that Mr. and Mrs. John Public have to have slicked up versions of ragtime and jazz music complete with electric banjos and drummers with eight arms. It's just not so. When the music stops in the Bustle and Bowes and the foot stompin' and yellin' starts, you know that here is music that can stand on its own merits when it is presented with understanding and honesty. Catch the Ragtimers when you're in St. Louis. Buy their records. Encourage them.

Yes, Virginia, there really is a Bob Wright and he's even better than Santa Claus because his great big sack is packed with ragtime goodies -- several hundred of them. Don't believe it? Well, you just try and stump him. Bob is a slender, 5 foot 9 or 10 inch, 25-year-old computer with a brush cut. Press the button and out comes ragtime, stride piano and modern jazz in a torrent. He plays rags by the note, at a sprightly clip, and with accuracy and good dynamic shading. I particularly enjoyed his exhibition of stride (eastern ragtime). Bob takes knuckle-busters like Harlem Strut, Steeplechase Rag or Jingles at blistering tempos without even wrinkling a finger.

Bob's knowledge of ragtime and jazz people, places and things is formidable. He has traced ancient ragtime figures like Sam Moore, Bud Minor and Metronome French to Philadelphia around 1840. As nearly as Bob can tell, these performers, and probably many others, were using strange, complex syncopations in their playing. Bar lines were bent back and forth at will. Bob plays the Blind Boone Medlies in this very loose and free manner -- at least that's what he told me he was doing. To my poor ears, accustomed as they are to more orthodox rhythms, it sounds like Bob can somehow unhook himself at the middle and go at it hammer and tongs without either side much caring what the other side is doing right up to the end when he manages to hook himself up again and stop both hands at the same time.

This same sort of thing was demonstrated on a piano roll of Boone's Medley No. 2 that I heard while in St. Louis. It sounded to me like a bad roll, or that the piano mechanism needed adjustment, but this - as well as Bob's version - supposedly comes out even, rhythmically, upon analysis. Bob will probably join the staff aboard The Goldenrod this fall to play ragtime piano. See you there, Bob.

-Tom Shea

RECORD REVIEW

This month's record review was sent over by our Ludlow correspondent, Brian Bulgin. Apart from its fascinating title, the album sounds like a good one for those who have been asking about instrumental ragtime. It is not stocked by the Society, but we can give you the publisher's address on request.

"When Grandma Was A Teenager" - A Programme of Ragtime Music with Minstrel and Gospel Songs. Vintage Jazz Music Society, VLP2

Georgia Sunset (Lampe) Pryor's Band
Red Pepper Rag (Lodge) Fred Van Eps (banjo orchestra)
Gabriel's Trumpet (traditional) Dinwiddie Quartet
Tickled to Death (Hunter) Peerless Orchestra
Everybody Twostep (Herzer) Mike Bernard (piano solo)
Music Box Rag (Luckey Roberts) Rogers Ragtime Orchestra
Midnight Whirl Rag (HEIN) Rogers Ragtime Orchestra
Tapioca (traditional) E. A. Cantrell & Ruhan Williams
I'm Alabama Bound (Hoffman) Prince's Band
Tantalising Tingles (Bernard) Mike Bernard (piano solo)
Ramshackle Rag (Ted Snyder) Prince's Band
Dill Pickles (Johnson) Chris Chapman (glass xylophone) with orchestra
Georgia Camp Meeting (Mills) Sousa Band

So ragtime is strictly piano music? That consigns 11/13 of this record to limbo, and as for the remaining 2/13, that's piano, true, but look at the pianist - Mike Bernard, and we know what the good book says about him.

If you think like that, don't bother to read further, friend, but return at once to living the rich, full life the way you have it worked out. For the faithful few, then, this reactionary record will, at any rate, illuminate their knowledge of the cheery, unsophisticated age out of which ragtime came. It could also, just possibly, give us some hint of the correct speed at which the music was played in its germinal period - NOT FAST - as the composers noted on their scores.

The bands, as might be supposed, do make the music sound a little ponderous, but in public concert it must have been a rousing sound. Sousa's Band makes an impressive thing of Kerry Mills' classic and the Luckey Roberts piece sounds like a rag that could use a good piano recording. So that the lusty blowers of the era, if they didn't make the music lightfooted, do make a joyous noise.

Mr. Van Eps' banjo solo is a miracle of mamual dexterity and doesn't take "Red Pepper" at that breakneck speed into which it can so easily stray. It is Chris Chapman's xylophone track, however, which would merit, if anything does, that old cliche that "this track alone is worth the price of the entire record." It isn't quite that good, but is a real charmer, full of raggy feeling. Who said ragtime was a piano music?

Strictly speaking, the two vocals should not interest readers of this journal. In passing, however, let us merely note that the Dinwiddies swing more than any of the colored vocal groups we've heard on record until the Mills Brothers came along (and what we remember about those gentlemen can't all be written off to nostalgia and senility). Messrs. [illegible] arranged in the [illegible] of the era, [illegible] from the only [illegible] distasteful records, but they sound as if they could move into the folk-singing age that surrounds us today, and

Cantrell & Williams, announced in the stentorian fashion of the era, suffer from the only really distasteful recording, but they sound as if they could move into the folk-sining age that surrounds us today, and make it to the top in short order.

And what of Mr. Bernard? Well, it may not be ragtime, but it is tuneful and not so crassly flamboyant as "They All Played Ragtime" has it (am I still in the Society?) I liked it, but then I can't find much wrong with "Nola." That's not ragtime, either, but who said ragtime was everything?

Brian Rust, that cornucopia of ancient recording lore, contributes an informative liner note rightly mentioning the unintelligible chatter by an unnamed vocalist on "Tickled to Death." Compared to it, the animal noises on those Red Hot Pepper records sound discreet.

And talking of the Peppers, "I'm Alabama Bound" has the same theme as Jelly Roll's "Don't You Leave Me Here." After all that chat about "St. Louis Tickle" and "Buddy Bolden's Blues" it makes you think: could Morton have been a . . . . . No, perish the thought.

-Brian Bulgin

RECORDS

We have received notice of a new record release from Windsor Research Publications, Inc. called "Nickelodeons." This is a 12" LP featuring the following instruments: Seeburg "G" Orchestrion, Mills Violano-Virtuoso, WurliTzer PianOrchestra, North Tonawanda Pianolin and Seeburg "A" Coin Piano. The album contains 18 numbers including Notre Dame Victory March; When You Wore a Tulip; Wedding Bells are Breaking Up That Old Gang of Mine; I Can't Give You Anything But Love; Candlestick Rag; Old Folks at Home (Swanee River); Entertainers Rag; Old Black Joe; Entry of the Gladiators; Stars and Stripes Forever and Dance of the Blue Danube.

We haven't heard this album, so can't vouch for it, but the price is $4.95 postpaid and you can order direct from Windsor Research Publications, Inc., Audio Products Division, Empire Building, Johnson City 77, New York.

FROM OUR MAILBAG

Received a note from Raymond Scribner who lives in Belmont, Australia. Apparently he is authoring a book called "Jazz Down Under . . . an Australian Jazz History." Ray says: "I don't know if any word has leaked out in the world re my project? The aim of the book is to trace chronologically the development of early jazz (and ragtime) in Australia to all jazz forms of the present day. I have spent about two full years on it and hope to have it completed by this Xmas. The book, I hope, will fill a valuable gap in world jazz history, as to date NOBODY has ever tackled the problem on Australian jazz!" We'll look forward to receiving a review copy soon, Ray.

A brief postcard from Geneva: "Peter est pour quelques jours a Geneve. Il y a beaucoup de musique chez Terbois ces jours-ci. Amities. Vincent Terbois et Peter Lundberg."

Marge Traeger writes from Kennewick, Washington: "While I was back East, my mother spoke of Glenn Rowell and said years ago he appeared over radio station WTIC in Hartford, Conn. as part of a comedy team but did not play piano, and she was quite surprised when the 'Ragtime Duet' album came out. I would like to see another duet album (Maddox-Rowell) as everyone isn't fortunate enough to be able to see them play and a record would be second best. It was after seeing Johnny Maddox play back in June, 1962 that ragtime became a must in our house."

From our Washington, D.C. correspondent, Edna Faye Peacock: "In the September issue of the Newsletter you asked about the nickelodeon museum near San Francisco. Having haunted the place on several trips to the West Coast, I can enthusiastically give a little information about Cliff House, Seal Rocks.

"It is situated several miles from the heart of San Francisco, near Golden Gate Park, and was the usual tourist center with restaurant, gift shop, vantage points from which to watch the seals sunning themselves on the rocks, and -- the nickelodeon museum with perhaps 50 or more old-time player pianos, organs, etc.

"Many of these were salvaged from the Great Earthquake in 1906, and were predominantly from the Barbary Coast area. Most of the piano rolls on these players were numbers popular at the turn of the century -- ragtime, and folk tunes from the covered wagon days which had been 'ragged' up. A few Mexican folk songs were 'ragged' also -- Ramona, Juanita, et al. Also there were old organs, from the very early instruments to the last of the theater organs. Lots of these had the decorative stained glass panels on the front which lighted up when the instrument was playing.

"The museum halls were always crowded with people playing the instruments -- all going at one time, with a different tune on each. I was trying to get certain melodies in my head to eventually carry to the piano to play; you can imagine, amidst all that cacaphony, what chance I had. My mother loved the place as much as I, and we usually went out there with a bag full of nickels and dimes to cram into the slots of the pianos and organs. Oh yes -- occasionally one would blow a fuse, causing it to catch fire.

"Unfortunately, on Christmas night 1963, my super California attraction burned down."